

# Nursing home, senior living visitation allowed in New Bedford due to vaccination of residents

Mayor Jon Mitchell and the Board of Health have rescinded an earlier restriction on nursing home and senior living visits, due to the widespread vaccination of residents at those facilities.

On December 14, the Mayor and Board of Health prohibited visitation at nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and senior living facilities, with limited exceptions, to protect residents from the spread of COVID-19. An emergency order by the Mayor and Board of Health effective March 8 will now rescind that restriction and allow safe visitation, but continues to outline stringent public health protocols and reporting requirements to ensure the health and safety of all senior residents.

“Our goal during the surges in virus transmission was always to protect the most vulnerable among us until they had the opportunity to be vaccinated. Now that the initial phases of vaccinations of residents at nursing homes and senior living facilities have taken place, we can once again permit visitation with health and safety protocols so that families can visit their loved ones,” said Mayor Mitchell.

The state’s and City’s latest guidance allows for in-person visitation with social distancing, screening, mask-wearing, and other protective measures.

Last spring, Mayor Mitchell and the Board of Health first announced emergency orders to keep residents of all senior living settings safe through the requirement of stringent

public health and sanitation requirements, and instituted limits on visitations in December to protect the health of senior residents.

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## **City of New Bedford, Mayor Jon Mitchell, mourn loss of longtime carpenter Pierre Tremblay due to COVID-19**

“I’m saddened by the news that Pierre Tremblay, a longtime carpenter in the City’s Department of Facilities and Fleet Management, passed away this week from complications of Covid-19.

It was shocking news to all of us who called Pierre a friend and colleague. Pierre was a masterful craftsman, whose skill was exceeded only by the pride he took in his work. With each of his projects, he believed he was making an enduring contribution to the city, and he was right.

His uncompromising commitment to excellence will continue to shine through the masterpieces he’s left behind. I will miss him for his optimism, his pleasant and engaging personality, and his selflessness. I offer my heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and the DFFM team.

If you’ve been to City Hall, you’ve likely admired some of Pierre’s fine work and will recognize it in these photos – including in the Election Commission Office and Treasurer’s Office, and the temporary customer service station in the Ashley Room.” -Mayor Jon Mitchell.



*City of New Bedford photo.*



*City of New Bedford photo.*

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# More than 600,000 people in Massachusetts fully vaccinated

Colin A. Young  
State House News Service

More than 62,000 vaccine doses were administered in the 24-hour period between updates from the Department of Public Health.

As of Thursday, there were 1,316,691 people in the Bay State who had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, an increase of 35,011 from Wednesday's report, and there were 614,589 people who are considered fully vaccinated, an increase of 27,422 from the previous day.

Overall, there were 62,433 more doses administered as of Thursday than there were as of the day before. In all, Massachusetts has administered 1,931,280 of the 2,399,100 doses delivered here by the federal government, roughly 80.5 percent.

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## Massachusetts Teachers Now Eligible For Vaccines on

# March 11

By Colin A. Young

State House News Service

Starting March 11, teachers, early educators and school staff members will be able to try to sign up for COVID-19 vaccine appointments through any of the state's 170 vaccination sites and mass vaccination sites plan to block off certain days to vaccinate educators, Gov. Charlie Baker said Wednesday morning.

The governor's announcement from the West Parish Elementary School in Gloucester comes as Baker and Education Commissioner Jeff Riley push for full-time, in-person education at all Massachusetts elementary schools by next month and after teachers unions ramped up a campaign backed by legislative leaders to get more of their members vaccinated sooner. One union official said teachers around the state were euphoric about the governor's announcement Wednesday.

It also followed President Joe Biden's decision Tuesday to prioritize the vaccination of pre-K-12 teachers and staff and child care workers through the federal pharmacy program and his direction to the roughly 20 states that had not already made teachers eligible to do so.

"My challenge to all states, territories, and the District of Columbia is this: We want every educator, school staff member, childcare worker to receive at least one shot by the end of the month of March," Biden said on Tuesday afternoon, adding that not every teacher would be able to secure an appointment in the first week.

By Wednesday morning, before Baker's announcement, CVS had added K-12 teachers to the list of populations eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine at its clinics, including those in Massachusetts.

Baker pointed out on a few occasions Wednesday that teachers were “next on the list” to become eligible under his administration’s plan and defended his approach that has focused on vaccinating people whose age or medical conditions “put them in significant risk of hospitalization and death associated with COVID.” But he said he would make educators and staffers eligible next week so there is no confusion “between federal eligibility guidelines and state eligibility guidelines and to coordinate with the feds.”

“I don’t want people to get confused about where they can go and where they can’t go if the federal rules associated with some of this are different. So we’re gonna move up the educator community, give them the ability to start booking appointments starting next week,” he said.

As soon as Baker made his announcement, Gloucester Mayor Sefatia Romeo Theken let out a loud exclamation, “Yes!”

Massachusetts Teachers Association President Merrie Najimy said Wednesday that the governor’s decision represented “a huge victory for our students, for our school employees and the entire school community.”

“As an educator of 30 years, I can tell you with confidence that educators across the state are joyful,” she said outside Watertown High School, though WCVB reported that she would not say whether she expects teachers will be back in classrooms five days a week by the early April deadline Riley has targeted.

On Friday afternoon, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will meet to hear a presentation and vote on the emergency adoption of regulatory amendments that would prioritize in-person instruction by giving Riley the authority to decide when hybrid and remote learning models will no longer count towards the state’s requirements for student learning hours.

The governor said there are about 400,000 teachers, early educators and school staff members who will become newly eligible for the vaccine next week. They will join everyone 65 years old or older and people with two or more certain health conditions in the competition for a limited supply of doses and appointments.

"The 65-plus group and the two health conditions group between them represent about a million residents. So far, we've received enough vaccine to vaccinate, so far, about one-third of the folks in that category," Baker said. "The math on this is pretty straightforward: If we add 400,000 people on March 11 to the eligible pool, that'll mean we'll be back to having about a million people who are eligible to receive a vaccine. And as I said, we currently get about 150,000 first doses per week from the federal government."

The governor said his team's estimates are that first dose appointments should "start to cover pretty much everybody in that group about a month after they're eligible."

The demand for vaccine shots has vastly outpaced the supply, causing frustration and chaos as the hundreds of thousands of eligible people compete for the tens of thousands of available appointments each week.

Both Pfizer and Moderna are expected to increase their production in March and the single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine approved last week is making its way to clinics in Massachusetts and around the country, offering hope of an accelerating vaccination effort.

But Baker said Wednesday that the White House told states not to expect any substantial increase in supply until the end of March and that the state would get less of the new Johnson & Johnson vaccine than it was expecting.

"Massachusetts has been notified by the feds that we're only scheduled to get one shipment, which we got this week, of

58,000 doses for the month of March and that has been distributed primarily to hospitals, health systems, some community health centers," Baker said, adding that the news was "a big surprise to everybody."

Baker said Johnson & Johnson is now expected to deliver "way less than half of than what was originally presumed to be coming in the month of March" and said he's hoping the timeline can be accelerated. If it is and the number of doses delivered to Massachusetts increases substantially, the governor said the state will be ready to put them into people's arms.

"I can promise you this, we have plenty of capacity to put every dose we get to work," he said.

It's been a little more than two weeks since people 65 and older became eligible for the vaccine, and teachers were slated to be a part of the next group, which also includes other "essential workers."

Already, other groups that were slated to become eligible for a vaccine on the basis of their occupations at roughly the same time as teachers are making their cases to be similarly moved up in the line.

MBTA workers represented by Carmen's Local 589 said Wednesday morning that Baker "is jeopardizing their lives and public health by letting red tape and a lack of planning delay the administration of coronavirus vaccines to local bus and train operators."

The union said the MBTA has a vaccination site established in Quincy and that workers who were given a tour of the site "hoped" that transit workers could be moved up in the state's prioritization since the MBTA was setting up the infrastructure to vaccinate its workforce.

"We walked through the Quincy site and got the tour, and we



were promised they'd have a coordinated rollout and plan where frontline transit personnel would be vaccinated in an orderly, coordinated fashion that helps ensure scheduling continuity and safety for the benefit of the riders," union president Jim Evers said. "We are praising MBTA management for having the infrastructure in place, but it seems the Governor just isn't paying attention so now we're among the last frontline workers to get vaccinated. It's a dangerous oversight by Baker, especially as schools reopen."

# Massachusetts COVID Vaccination Totals Catch Up With Infections

By Colin A. Young  
State House News Service

As Massachusetts enters the second month of March to be shaded by the coronavirus pandemic, the number of people here who have been fully vaccinated is roughly equal to the number of people who have been infected with COVID-19 over the last year.

The equivalent of the population of Methuen – roughly 51,000 people – got their second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine between Friday's report from the Department of Public Health and Sunday's update. There are 550,000 people fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, Gov. Charlie Baker said Monday morning, compared to 550,302 total confirmed COVID-19 infections since the start of the pandemic.

With more than 1.2 million residents having received at least

one vaccine dose, Massachusetts is again beginning to reopen its economy more widely and a third vaccine approved by federal officials over the weekend could help alleviate some of the tensions that come with the limited supply of doses.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued an emergency use authorization Saturday for the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which was developed in part by a group at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. It joins the Moderna and Pfizer two-dose vaccines in the public health arsenal and states are expected to receive an initial batch of the doses this week.

“Our healthcare leaders and clinicians see the authorization of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine as a significant step forward in the effort to vaccinate residents of the commonwealth,” Valerie Fleishman, senior vice president and chief innovation officer at the Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association, said. “This vaccine has been shown to be highly effective in protecting against COVID-19-related hospitalizations and deaths, and those who receive it should have every confidence that they are protected against serious illness due to COVID-19 and its variants.”

Johnson & Johnson is expected to deliver about 20 million doses of its single-shot COVID-19 vaccine to the federal government for distribution by the end of March. The New York Times reported Monday morning that Biden administration officials speaking on background said that the company will deliver 3.9 million shots this week but none next week.

Baker said last week the combination of Johnson & Johnson’s vaccine getting approval and the plans Pfizer and Moderna have to increase their production “could be a really big moment.”

On Monday, Baker said the new vaccine “will certainly dramatically boost” the state’s vaccination efforts and “should mean a big increase” in the amount of vaccine

available.

On Feb. 24, Baker estimated it would take about a month, barring an increase in vaccine supply, to get through the roughly 1 million people who at that time were becoming newly eligible to receive vaccines, including the large group of residents in the age 65 and older group.

Also on Monday, Baker said about 68 percent of residents 75 and older had been vaccinated. In the long-term care sector, 90 percent of residents and about 70 percent of staff had received vaccines, he said.

As of Monday morning, Massachusetts moved back to Step 2 of Phase III of the administration's reopening plan, which means that occupancy limits broadly increase to 50 percent for most businesses and indoor performance venues and indoor recreational activities can reopen. Restaurants no longer have a percent-based capacity restriction but must adhere to six-foot social distancing, limits of six people per table and 90-minute limits.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky, who was the head of Massachusetts General Hospital's infectious disease division before being tapped for her federal role, was specifically asked about Baker's newest rules for restaurants Friday and said her agency "would really encourage people and states to not expand and release restrictions."

"Given the trends that we've seen in just the last couple of days, I would say, you know, we can't be in a place where we're lifting restrictions right now," she said, according to a transcript provided by the White House. "If we level off at the level of 70,000 cases a day, we are just at the level where – where we had the peak before – or base before we have the fall peak."

Over the weekend in Massachusetts, 2,944 people were newly

confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 and the state announced the recent COVID-19 deaths of 93 more people. There are 760 people hospitalized with COVID-19 in Massachusetts and the state estimates that just more than 30,000 residents currently have active and contagious cases of the respiratory disease.

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## **COVID-19 Update: FDA issues authorization for Quidel QuickVue At-Home COVID-19 test**

Today, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued an emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Quidel QuickVue At-Home COVID-19 Test, another antigen test where certain individuals can rapidly collect and test their sample at home, without needing to send a sample to a laboratory for analysis.

The QuickVue At-Home COVID-19 Test is authorized for prescription home use with self-collected anterior nasal (nares) swabs from individuals ages 14 and older or individuals ages 8 and older with swabs collected by an adult. The test is authorized for individuals suspected of COVID-19 by their healthcare provider within the first six days of symptom onset.

“The FDA continues to prioritize the availability of more at-home testing options in response to the pandemic,” said Jeff Shuren, M.D., J.D., director of the FDA’s Center for Devices and Radiological Health. “The QuickVue At-Home COVID-19 Test is another example of the FDA working with test developers to bring important diagnostics to the public.”

In addition to this new prescription home test, Quidel also was issued an EUA in December 2020 for their QuickVue SARS Antigen Test which is authorized for use in laboratories certified under the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) to perform high, moderate or waived complexity tests, as well as for point-of-care testing by facilities operating under a CLIA Certificate of Waiver.

The FDA, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, protects the public health by assuring the safety, effectiveness, and security of human and veterinary drugs, vaccines and other biological products for human use, and medical devices. The agency also is responsible for the safety and security of our nation's food supply, cosmetics, dietary supplements, products that give off electronic radiation, and for regulating tobacco products.

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## **New Bedford man fed up with Gov. Baker's treatment of working middle class Americans**

"I think it's time we start asking Mr. Baker what the dept of unemployment is doing with the working people's money.

Why is it taking so long for funds to be sent to us working-class Americans? Why am I waiting 2 months for unemployment? Why after 5 weeks has an adjuster finally been assigned to me, the working-class American?

What the heck are they doing?

Listen I get it. There's a lot of people in the same situation. I know people that have been waiting 3 months with no income that worked for years upon years and never got laid off. What the hell is going on?

Mr. Baker instead of worrying about small businesses bending the rules to try to survive I think you need to open your eyes to what the DUA is doing to the working-class Americans that reside in the state of Massachusetts. They're dragging their feet with our benefits and we are getting tired of it.

My claim was still open from last year when COVID hit and my company didn't know how to handle it. Since then I worked 10 months and was laid off again due to towns not giving my company permits to do the work on the roads. What the hell is going?

I speak for myself but I've started to get really pissed off on how Massachusetts and our elected officials are handling this whole COVID thing. It's not like it's a new thing! It's been a year."-Jay Siggy.

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**Acushnet Fire Chief  
Gallagher: "This is not over  
yet. Remain vigilant."**

"This past Friday and Saturday we tested 106 individuals. With all testing completed, one person was found to be positive. That is a percentage positivity rate of less than 1%.

"The virus is still here. One Acushnet resident received the news this morning that none of us want to get. We wish for

them a speedy recovery.

“With certain restrictions easing, please keep in mind that this is not yet over. Remain vigilant.

“This past January we would test hundreds of people on Fridays and Saturdays and make dozens of phone calls on Sunday morning. That is never easy. Let’s hope today’s one call is followed by no Sunday morning calls soon.”- Kevin Gallagher.

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# Massachusetts Lawmakers Confront Baker on Vaccine Rollout

By Colin A. Young  
State House News Service

Gov. Charlie Baker spoke about the state’s COVID-19 vaccine rollout and engaged in a back-and-forth on the particulars of the effort with the Legislature’s COVID-19 committee for an hour Thursday, but co-chair Rep. Bill Driscoll thought the gravity of the issues residents have faced in securing a vaccine had not gotten through to the state’s chief executive.

“I just really want to stress that I think you’re missing how broken the system is right now and the approach is not working for the citizens of the commonwealth,” the Milton Democrat said as Baker prepared to log off from the hearing. “It needs to be addressed.”

Baker logged onto the Legislature’s first COVID-19 oversight hearing Thursday morning armed with statistics about the state’s improving virus conditions and his administration’s

efforts to get COVID-19 vaccines into the arms of more residents.

Massachusetts is tops in the nation for first doses administered per capita among states with five million or more people; the Bay State has administered more than three times more doses per capita than the European Union and more than five times more per capita than Canada; the state ranks second in the country for percentage of Black residents who have gotten at least one shot; and “much of the news on COVID is better than it’s been in quite some time,” the governor said from his ceremonial office in the State House.

That wasn’t exactly the conversation the new Joint Committee on COVID-19 and Emergency Preparedness was interested in having, though the chairs also acknowledged the improving conditions.

“Unfortunately, these hopeful figures do not tell the whole story,” Driscoll said after himself referencing recent improvements in COVID-19 metrics here in his opening remarks. “These numbers hide the confusion caused by frequent pivots and course corrections, and the daily frustrations residents face trying to access the vaccine. Residents must book their appointments on cumbersome and flawed websites and hope their internet connection is stronger than the thousands of others competing for the same batch of limited appointments. The system benefits those with time, resources, and mobility and disadvantages those most vulnerable populations that have suffered disproportionately from this pandemic. It tries to prioritize efficiency over equity.”

Baker, in his prepared remarks and in response to questions from lawmakers, cited the constraints in the supply of the two federally-approved vaccines as the primary challenge and defended his administration’s decisions to prioritize groups that other states did not, like group home residents and staff, inmates and staff at prisons and jails, and all



hospital workers.

“I think many states chose to pursue a variety of different approaches to this which makes it hard to draw really broad comparisons between states,” the governor said. “As I said in my remarks, Massachusetts chose early on to prioritize a number of communities and a number of professions that weren’t prioritized in other states that did make us look, if you just based it on the numbers, like a low performer relative to many other states that didn’t focus on those hard-to-reach populations that we chose to focus on.”

More than 1.5 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine had been administered in Massachusetts as of Wednesday, the Department of Public Health said.

There were 1,084,888 people as of Wednesday who had received at least one dose of a vaccine – an increase of 23,553 people since Tuesday – and 433,593 people have gotten both doses of the vaccine, an increase of 18,652 people from Tuesday’s report. In all, Massachusetts has administered 1,518,481 doses of the vaccine, which is 76.9 percent of the 1,973,900 doses the federal government has shipped here.

In his prepared remarks, Baker acknowledged the frustration that many residents have experienced as they try to use the state’s website to get a vaccination appointment for themselves or a loved one but he defended the site as an important reason for the state’s vaccination numbers and suggested some of it was inevitable given that “demand outstrips supply 10 times over.”

“I understand the enormous frustration when so many people are attempting to secure a small number of appointments. However, for all its faults, people from every corner of the commonwealth have managed to book over 300,000 vaccination appointments on that site since it went live back in January,” he said. “And that does have something to do with why

Massachusetts has been able to vaccinate more than a million people since the start of this effort.”

Last Thursday, as more than 70,000 appointments were to be made available to the seniors and people with multiple health complications who newly qualified for a vaccine, heavy traffic torpedoed the state’s vaccination scheduling system and website. Baker said he was “pissed off” about the fiasco and vowed that “it’s gonna get fixed.”

Though this week’s release of 50,000 vaccine appointments for eligible residents did not appear nearly as chaotic as last week’s fiasco and the Baker administration had made changes to the website and scheduling system like adding a virtual waiting room, some vaccine hunters reported estimated wait times measured in days.

The most confrontational moments during Baker’s appearance before the joint committee came during questioning from Sen. Eric Lesser, who pressed the governor on his previous comments about the website and said the rollout “has not been lumpy and bumpy” as Baker often describes it. “It has been a failure,” Lesser said.

“The biggest challenge with the website, from the beginning, has been supply and the fact that people get frustrated – and I understand why – when they can’t access an appointment,” Baker said, adding at various points during the hearing that his team plans to roll out improvements to the website as they become ready.

Lesser countered that “nobody disagrees with you that the supply is limited” but said that “it wouldn’t have made a difference” if Massachusetts had 1 million doses available and the website still crashed. He then asked Baker if his administration had conducted a “load analysis” before announcing that 1 million more people would become eligible last week.

"What happened to the website is on us," Baker said.

Lesser asked, "Will you say sorry for the million people?"

"Of course, absolutely. Definitely. Yes, of course," Baker said. "And it's going to be a constant challenge going forward that we don't have enough supply to serve the population that wants to get vaccinated. I hope at some point that's not true anymore."

The website and scheduling system snafu of last week and Thursday's waiting room frustration were the latest stumbles in the Baker administration's vaccine rollout. House Speaker Ronald Mariano has said the rollout "has been marked by both logistical and communications shortcomings" and Senate President Karen Spilka called it a "constantly changing and confusing" plan.

Complaints from residents in the earliest phases of the plan prompted changes to the appointment website, which was initially just a map of vaccination sites. The administration established a call center to help people access appointments, but only after seniors 75 or older became eligible and reported difficulties using the website.

Baker also announced a system in which anyone who brings a senior 75 or older to a mass vaccination site can get vaccinated themselves, regardless of their age or risk factors. The goal was to help ensure that those most at risk of dying from COVID-19 get vaccinated, but critics said it also effectively created black market for senior citizen companions and questioned the sudden vaccination eligibility for healthy companions.

"Frankly, I am just baffled at what we've been through and my experience of this is very different than the one you've laid out," Sen. Cindy Friedman told Baker. "The twists and turns, the change in plans, the communication that changes depending on who you are talking to and from day to day, the utter

uncertainty of how this vaccine rollout was going to roll out and is rolling out – I can say as someone who has been involved in this process, and deeply involved since last March, that even I, with all my knowledge, am completely at a loss as to what is going on at times and what is going to come next.”

Driscoll and his Senate co-chair, Sen. Jo Comerford of Northampton, each asked Baker to provide the committee with specific information and various documents. Driscoll requested details on and a timeline for the website improvements Baker mentioned.

Comerford asked for a “vaccine leadership organizational chart,” a detailed picture of the hierarchy at the state’s COVID-19 Command Center, the contracts for myriad vendors the state is working with on vaccine distribution, and a detailed accounting of federal funds that have flowed to Massachusetts during the pandemic and recovery.

The governor was happy to fulfill the request for the federal aid details during Thursday’s hearing, though Comerford soon cut him off and asked that he present the information in writing so as to not take away time for lawmakers to ask him questions.

“I actually did spend a little time because I thought that might be important to you guys ... \$71 billion has come to Massachusetts one way or another, through the four major federal relief programs. Twenty billion six hundred thousand of that went to unemployment insurance, \$27 billion of that went to the PPP program for businesses, \$8 billion went to stimulus checks,” Baker said. He added after Comerford made note of the time and asked him to submit the rest in writing, “OK, either way.”

During the livestream, Driscoll also requested that Baker make time in two weeks to again testify before the Joint Committee

on COVID-19 and Emergency Preparedness as it embarks on a series of hearings.

“Well this one’s been so much fun, I’ll certainly look forward to coming back,” the governor said. He added, “Yeah, sure, I’ll come back in a couple of weeks. But part of the reason for that is because I recognize and understand that these challenges are ones that whether you’re in state government, local government, federal government, this thing is a bear to wrestle to the ground and we all, in our own way, have had to deal with that on behalf of our constituents over the course of the past year.”

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## **Governor Baker Announces Plans for Continued Reopening**

Today, the Baker-Polito Administration announced that Massachusetts would advance to Step 2 of Phase III of the state’s reopening plan on Monday, March 1, and also announced its plan to transition to Step 1 of Phase IV on Monday, March 22. With public health metrics continuing to trend in a positive direction, including drops in average daily COVID cases and hospitalizations, and vaccination rates continuing to increase, the Administration is taking steps to continue to reopen the Commonwealth’s economy.

The Administration also announced more than \$49 million in awards to 1,108 additional small businesses in the eighth round of COVID-19 relief grants administered by the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation (MGCC). These new awards are the result of work by MGCC to engage with applicants that meet sector and demographic priorities but are

missing certain documents that are necessary to be considered for an award.

### **Phase III, Step 2:**

On May 18, 2020, the Baker-Polito Administration released a four-phased plan to reopen the economy conditioned on sustained improvements in public health data. As of October, 2020, the reopening had proceeded to Step 2 of Phase III of the plan. On December 13, 2020, in response to an increase in new COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations following the Thanksgiving holiday, the Commonwealth returned to Step 1 of Phase III, reducing capacities across a broad range of sectors and tightening several other workplace restrictions.

Since the beginning of this year, key public health data, such as new cases and hospitalizations, have been closely monitored and a significant decline has been documented, allowing for a return to Step 2 of Phase III, effective March 1 for all cities and towns. This includes the following updates to businesses, activities and capacities:

Indoor performance venues such as concert halls, theaters, and other indoor performance spaces will be allowed to reopen at 50% capacity with no more than 500 persons

Indoor recreational activities with greater potential for contact (laser tag, roller skating, trampolines, obstacle courses) will be allowed to reopen at 50% capacity

Capacity limits across all sectors with capacity limits will be raised to 50% and exclude employees

Restaurants will no longer have a percent capacity limit and will be permitted to host musical performances; six-foot social distancing, limits of six people per table and 90 minute limits remain in place

Residents must continue to wear masks to prevent the spread of

COVID-19, and are encouraged to avoid contact outside of their immediate households. The Travel Advisory and other public health orders remain in effect.

### **Gathering Changes and Phase IV Start**

Provided public health metrics continue to improve, effective on March 22, all communities in Massachusetts will move into Step 1 of Phase IV of the state's reopening plan. This will open a range of previously closed business sectors under tight capacity restrictions that are expected to be adjusted over time if favorable trends in the public health data continue. Effective on the planned advancement to Step 1 of Phase IV, the following industries will be permitted to operate at a strict 12% capacity limit after submitting a plan to the Department of Public Health (DPH):

Indoor and outdoor stadiums

Arenas

Ballparks

Also effective on March 22, gathering limits for event venues and in public settings will increase to 100 people indoors and 150 people outdoors. Outdoor gatherings at private residences and in private backyards will remain at a maximum of 25 people, with indoor house gatherings remaining at 10 people.

Additionally, dance floors will be permitted at weddings and other events only, and overnight summer camps will be allowed to operate this coming summer. Exhibition and convention halls may also begin to operate, following gatherings limits and event protocols. Other Phase IV sectors must continue to remain closed.

### **COVID-19 Business Relief Grants**

Today, an additional 1,108 businesses are receiving COVID-19 relief grants totaling more than \$49 million in awards to help with expenses like payroll, benefits, utilities and rent. To

date, the Baker-Polito Administration has awarded more than \$563 million in direct financial support to 12,320 businesses impacted by the pandemic through the Small Business and Sector-Specific Grant Programs.

Each business meets sector and demographic priorities set for the two grant programs. More than half of grantees are restaurants, bars, caterers, operators of personal services like hair and nail salons, and independent retailers. Over half of the businesses receiving relief are women-and-minority-owned enterprises.

Today's awards are the result of a process by MGCC to engage directly with applicants that met sector and demographic priorities but were missing documents necessary to be considered for an award. MGCC is continuing to work with business owners in targeted sectors and demographic groups to allow for applicants to submit necessary documents.